



Learning Who My Real Friends Are Post October 7th

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The envelope slid through the mail slot, big swooping handwritten letters to make the words, “I simply want you to know you are seen, your voice is heard, and you matter. I am sorry for your pain, the amount of hardship you continue to feel and experience as a Jewish woman. I care about you.”

The letter came from a non-Jewish friend I see on Zoom twice a month, who lives across the country from me. We’ve never even met in person. But since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th, I’ve learned with stunning clarity who my friends are. In texts and emails, phone calls and handwritten notes. People proclaiming that they don’t know what to say but they are here for me, they love me, they would hide me, they would fight for me.

I’ve also learned who is not my friend.

Via social media posts or awkward silences on a group Zoom. By saying it’s better if we don’t discuss it when I say how hard the last six weeks have been. By quietly and quickly slipping away in conversations about Israel and the resulting antisemitism that has swept across the globe.

I said a fierce and specific goodbye to a woman I’d known for more than a decade when she parroted the antisemitic tropes populating angry protests. She used terms like genocide and apartheid and ceasefire, all couched in a dramatic insistence on “humanitarianism.” The woman is neither Jewish nor Arab, and when I called her on it, she gaslit me.

I will sever ties with people who chant for a “free Palestine, from the river to the sea.” I won’t call a person a friend if they insist that the most brutal attack on Jews since the Holocaust “didn’t happen in a vacuum.” Or if they scream for a ceasefire. Especially when they have no literal skin in the game.

Since October 7th, I’ve unfriended, unfollowed and blocked a lot of people and accounts. My “search” page on Instagram is starkly blue and white these days, as the algorithms adjust to my proudly pro-Israel and pro-peace stance. Yes, you read that right – I’m not a fan of violence, although I recognize what a privilege it is to say “I believe in non-violence,” as a woman in the gym locker room said with a nervous giggle recently when we broached the topic of the Middle East. Sure, yeah, I agree – violence is not the best way to act out your beliefs.

But sometimes, you have no other choice but to take action. Smart, strategic, integrity-based action.

Like in response to thousands of terrorists cutting a fence and charge into the only Jewish nation in the world to slaughter, burn, rape and torture thousands just because they’re Jewish. Jewish identity is at the core of all of this.

Recently, I offered to buy anyone who will read it Noa Tishby’s book, *Israel: a simple guide to the most misunderstood nation on Earth*. I mailed a few copies to people I’ve never met because they promised to read it.

I've subscribed to Substacks by people on the ground in Israel, so I can learn from primary sources what's really happening. I am trying to understand the fierce and immediate antisemitism that emerged as a response to brutal murder and hostage-taking. It's the oldest form of bigotry which apparently can't be stamped out. We might actually be the nation destined to stand alone, as a "light unto the nations" but separate from all, as our tradition suggests.

I didn't want to believe that. I, like so many Jews, have spent my life trying to blend, assimilate and be like everyone else. When I was a kid, we drove around oohing and ahing at houses decorated with strings of lights. For a time, we had stockings and left cookies for a Santa we didn't believe in, just to assimilate in mid-20th century America.

Still, we went to temple, wore costumes on Purim and celebrated Passover at my grandparents' long table. We felt safe as Jews in America. We believed an event like the Holocaust could "never again" happen. We insisted the world had learned the error of its ways, was more enlightened. We felt bolstered by Israel, with no need to live there – its mere existence was proof that Jews had become strong, and the only Jewish nation in the world could remain a safety net we would never have to rely on.

Now I don't feel safe. And, I'm ashamed to say, I took for granted that there existed a strong Jewish nation with fierce technology, the most humanitarian military in the world and industries on the cutting edge, that turned a dusty piece of land with no natural resources into a thriving entrepreneurial and agricultural success.

Before October 7th, I thought most people were not antisemitic. And while I hope that is true, I know now that more people hold antisemitic views than I had realized. And yet, I must believe a few key things are different now compared to a century ago.

First, President Biden and many other world leaders were quick to condemn Hamas and the attacks on October 7th. Unequivocally and without conditions. They continue to insist that antisemitism must be stamped out. And many "righteous Gentiles," celebrities and everyday folks alike, are standing up for their Jewish neighbors, nailing mezuzahs to their doorposts and donning Jewish stars on their clothing in solidarity.

But a Jewish man was killed recently by a bullhorn in Los Angeles, and it took a week to arrest his murderer. A French Jewish woman was stabbed in the stomach, her door graffitied with swastikas. A German kindergarten named for Anne Frank was renamed to make it "non-political." When graduate students at a local art school near where I live flew Palestinian flags from their windows and the dean insisted they take them down, he later apologized in the name of free speech. Only when Jewish donors withdrew their support did he insist that the flags be removed permanently.

The "free Palestine" protestors are screaming louder, so they capture more headlines, and are disproportionately represented in the media compared with the quiet, peaceful pro-Israel marches. And don't get me started on the media – so many news outlets are fomenting rage and sowing division, and some are complicit in the attacks by buying images and content from freelancers joyriding alongside terrorists.

Jews are 0.2% of the world population. We're tiny, insignificant. So why all the violent and hateful opposition?

In the weeks since October 7th, I've taken to wearing my Jewish star necklaces. I purchased an Israeli flag pin to display on my jacket. (Ironically, it was made in China, which recently took Israel literally off the map.) I've gone to synagogue more, am keeping close to my Jewish brethren.

And now I know who I can rely on, and who to avoid.

A mere week after the attacks, a group of writers gathered around my dining room table. One woman asked questions when I said there is a double standard when it comes to Jews and Israel. Two days later, she emailed me and said she had been curious about what I said, so she educated herself and now understands what I meant. My heart nearly burst out of my chest with gratitude. This means more than you know, I wrote back. Two weeks later, she checked in again to see how I was doing. Before this, we were just acquaintances in a writers group. Now, I cherish her as a kind, open, thoughtful and true friend.

Since October 7th, the Jewish community seems more united, tightly aligned and prouder than I've seen in a long time. The biggest message to come from this awful situation is that our love of tradition, ancestry and each other is way stronger than any hate for us. I've always been a proud Jew, and now I see how crucial it is to project strength for my identity and connection to my ancestral traditions to anyone who's paying attention. And if that means someone I once called friend grows uncomfortable, or silent, then they were never a friend at all.